

THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE CHRONICLE:
AN EXPLANATION OF THE DATING ERRORS WITHIN
BOOK 1 OF THE CHRONICLE OF MATTHEW OF EDESSA

by

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One of the most informative histories of Byzantium, Syria, and the Caucasus is the chronicle of Matthew of Edessa (*Mattēos Uīhayec'i*), which spans the years 952–1129¹. Matthew wrote the Chronicle in three parts. The first, which covers the century 401–500 of the Armenian era (952–1052), describes events in Byzantium, Syria, and the Armenian kingdoms. Within the second book, which covers the years 501–550 (1052–1102), Matthew begins to narrow his geographical scope, focusing more specifically on events in Cilicia and Syria; his third book, which covers the years 550–577 (1101–1129), is primarily an account of events in Edessa, and in the emerging principalities of Cilician Armenia.

The first book of the Chronicle may thus be seen as background material for the history of the Edessene Armenians that Matthew wished to write. It focuses upon the history of, and interactions between, the Byzantine empire and the autonomous kingdoms of Armenia, Georgia, and Albania. It traces the rise in Byzantine power as the warrior-emperors Nikephoros Phokas, John Tzimiskes, and Basil II enlarged the empire to the east, at the expense of its Muslim neighbours. Simultaneously, it shows the political decisions, power struggles, and negotiations that resulted in the gradual loss of Armenian independence, as the autonomous kingdoms were annexed to the empire one by one. The book concludes with the tale

¹ The Chronicle has been transmitted with a continuation by Grigor Erēc', which takes the narrative down to the year 1162/3. Both Azat Bozoyan (*Byuzandiayi arevelyan k'atāk'anut'yunē ev Kilikyan Hayastanē ŽB dari 30–70-akan t'vakannerin*, pp. 27–29) and Tim Greenwood ('Armenian Sources', p. 234) have suggested that Matthew's own final entry was that for 1128/9, not that for 1136/7 as suggested by prior editors and translators. This conclusion can easily be supported on the basis of Matthew's own statements of authorial intention, and on the basis of the otherwise unexplained shift in focus of the 1136/7 entry to Kesun.

of the destruction of independent Armenia, and describes the first Turkish incursions into the annexed Armenian lands.

Matthew composed Book 1 primarily from other written sources that were available to him; the information he includes gives some indication of the range of source material that was available to a historian living in Edessa in the 1130s. His work also provides corroboration for the other extant sources for the period, including the history of John Skylitzes, the history of Yahyā ibn Sa‘id of Antioch, and the Armenian histories of Step’anos Asolik² and Aristakēs Lastivertc’i. As a result, the ‘background material’ of Book 1, and of the first part of Book 2, has assumed more importance for Byzantine and Armenian historians of the tenth and eleventh centuries than the geographically limited information that comprises Book 3.

The difficulty is presented by the book’s shortcomings. Whereas the histories of Skylitzes, Yahyā, Asolik, and Aristakēs contain more or less reliable dates, Matthew’s chronology in Book 1 is riddled with errors that are unique to his work. He is writing about events which took place before his own lifetime; he had the benefit neither of personal memory nor of eyewitness corroboration when he came to set them in order. His lack of personal knowledge of events resulted in chronological errors that are much more pronounced in Book 1 than in the remainder of the Chronicle. These errors render it difficult to cite the text as corroboration for the other histories of the period. It also becomes difficult to interpret events for which Matthew provides the only record, such as the coronation of a king in the city of Ani in 962/3, or the dispute between the katholikos Petros Getadarj and the king Smbat-Yovhannēs between 1037 and 1039. How are we to understand the information Matthew has reported when his chronology cannot be trusted?

One approach to the problem is to look for patterns of error that may be found in Matthew’s chronology and see how well these patterns can be extrapolated to dates for which there is no external evidence. On matters of Byzantine history, for example — events in Constantinople, imperial campaigns in both the eastern and western parts of the Empire — his dates are relatively accurate. His errors almost never have a magnitude of more than one year; where they occur, they have echoes in other extant sources. His gravest errors are restricted to the history of the Armenian

² I am grateful to Dr. Tim Greenwood of the University of St. Andrews, who provided me with a partial copy of the Malxasianc’ edition of the text of Asolik. I have used this text for direct quotation, and all translations are my own; however, my page references are to the French translation of Macler, which is the more widely available text.

church and the Armenian kingdoms, and in particular to the tenth century. It is the identification of these patterns that will allow an untangling of the chronology that Matthew has presented, and restore misplaced entries to their proper dates. My aim in this article is threefold: I will examine the chronological features of Matthew's account of Byzantium and Armenia throughout Book 1, and will propose a solution to his most problematic chronological errors. These include his most notorious error — the fifty-year misplacement of the 1021 civil war between the brother-kings Smbat-Yovhannēs I and Ašot IV — and related prosopographical problems in his account of the Armenian royal succession before 1021, and the inaccurate dates he gives for the events of the reign of David *cūropalates* of Tayk³. I will investigate Matthew's information about the history of the Arcruni family of Vaspurakan, the bulk of which is unique in his history. I will also examine Matthew's account of the history of the Armenian church and its leaders, and suggest a single 'ecclesiastical' source, probably from Vaspurakan and now lost, that could explain certain features of the information Matthew gives for Bagratuni, Arcruni, and ecclesiastical history within Book 1. The solutions to these chronological puzzles will allow us to better assess the reliability of the information he gives, particularly where his account is uncorroborated in other sources.

Chronological features of Book 1

It is evident from the outset of Book 1 that Matthew is ill-informed about the events of the tenth century. His second entry, for the year 407 (958/9), records an Arab siege and capture of Byzantine-held Samosata; although the date is correct, the identities of besieger and besieged have been transposed³. His chronological problems begin shortly thereafter, in the entry for 410 (961/2). Here Matthew records the coronation of Gagik I Bagratuni in Ani — a coronation that did not take place until 438 (989/90).⁴ These chronological errors may best be examined when Matthew's chronicle entries have been categorised according to their topics.

³ Both Asolik (ch. 7 p. 38) and Yahyā ibn Sa‘id (I, pp. 771–775) contradict Matthew's account. According to Yahyā, whose information is rather detailed, the emperor Tzimiskes and the *parakoimomenos* Basil took the city after a siege.

⁴ Asolik ch. 30 p. 138.

Byzantine imperial history

Both the chronological accuracy and the factual confusion displayed in Matthew's brief account of the battle of Samosata in 407 (958/9) are characteristic of his treatment of this topic. Within these entries, the majority of Matthew's dates are correct. The errors he displays have analogues in other sources; for example, the revolt of Bardas Phokas in 987 is dated by Matthew to the preceding year, which corresponds with Asolik's date for the beginning of the revolt⁵. In another example, Matthew has placed the 986 defeat of Basil II in Bulgaria in 437 (988/9), making it contemporaneous with the 989 earthquake in Constantinople; Skylitzes has done the same, although he set both these events in 986 rather than 989⁶.

Matthew does appear to have made a grave error in dating the death of Basil II, which occurred in December 1025⁷. His notice is placed just after the text of a prophecy attributed to the *vardapet* Yovhannēs Kozeřn in 478 (1029/30); Matthew claims that Basil died 'in the same year'. Here Matthew has also erroneously recorded the deaths of Senek'erim Arcruni and Gurgēn of Abkhazia, who are believed to have died in 1026 and 1027 respectively⁸. His account of the reign of Constantine VIII, however, shows that Matthew has implicitly dated Basil's death correctly. He states that Constantine reigned for four years, yet he has compressed Constantine's reign to a single year in the text, and records his death in 479 (1030/1). If these four years are subtracted from 478, he implicitly gives the correct date — 474 (1025/6) — for Basil's death. Given the immense stature of Basil in Armenia, and Matthew's usual chronological accuracy in matters of Byzantine history, it is inconceivable that this misdating represents true confusion on his part. The coincidence of royal deaths that he has reported represents not chronological error, but a literary device that connects them to the dire prophecy of Yovhannēs Kozeřn.

⁵ Asolik ch. 25-26, pp. 129-131.

⁶ Skylitzes p. 277.

⁷ Yahyā III pp. 481-3; Aristakēs pp. 39-40; Skylitzes p. 306.

⁸ Cyrille Toumanoff, *Manuel de généalogie et de chronologie pour l'histoire de la Caucاسie chrétienne: (Arménie, Géorgie, Albanie)* (Rome, Edizioni Aquila, 1976): 12.18, 22.2.

History of the Bagratunis and Ani

Matthew's serious chronological errors begin when he turns to the topic of Armenian royal history, and in particular to the history of the Bagratuni family. His information about events concerning the Bagratuni clan may be split into two groups. Within the first group, the entries are dated between 410 (961/2) and 425 (976/7); these are separated from the second group by a gap of 45 years. It is this first group of entries which produces the most difficult dating problems. It contains the single most conspicuous chronological error of his entire history. It is generally marked by a confusion of names, dates, and places. In particular, it seems that Matthew has confused the tenth-century king, Ašot III, with his descendant Ašot IV. He has compounded the error by 'correcting' the account of the coronation of Ašot III, replacing his name with that of Gagik I (son of Ašot III and father of Ašot IV).

Gagik I Bagratuni came to the throne of Armenia around 439 (990/1), upon the death of his brother Smbat II. His rule was contemporaneous with that of Basil II of Byzantium (976-1025); as with Basil, Gagik's reign is generally acknowledged as an apogee for his kingdom, and one that is not well-documented in the surviving historical sources. He died between 1017 and 1020; his sons, Smbat-Yovhannēs (usually known simply as Yovhannēs) and Ašot, fought for control of the kingdom shortly after his death. The brothers died within a year of each other, Ašot in 489 (1040/1) and Yovhannēs in 490 (1041/2). The death of Yovhannēs triggered the annexation of Armenia by the Byzantine empire, which Yovhannēs' young successor, his nephew Gagik II, was unable to prevent.

Matthew records these events, but places them much earlier in his chronology than they actually occurred. His first mention of Bagratuni history records the accession in 410 (961/2) of a king called Gagik. It is clear that the 'Gagik' to whom he refers is Gagik I, the father of Yovhannēs and Ašot, who was not actually crowned until 439 (990/1). He claims that Gagik 'had not yet been seated on the throne of the kingdom of the Armenian people and a crown had not been placed upon his head'⁹ suggesting that the coronation was a formality. Matthew is the only source to suggest that there was a coronation, or a ceremony of any sort, in 961. This date has usually been taken as a reference to a delayed coronation of Ašot III Bagratuni, who had taken effective power in 952/3 after the

⁹ 'վասն զի չկ ևս էր նստեալ յաթոռ թագաւորութեան տանն Հայոց և ոչ էր եղեալ թագ ի վերայ զինոյ իւրոյ'. Matthew p. 3.

death of his father Abas¹⁰; there is no indication in other primary sources, however, that Ašot had been forced to delay his coronation. Asołik reports that Ašot reigned for 25 years, and died in 426 (977/8). If so, it follows that he was crowned in 401 (952/3) — a year before his father's death. Has Matthew misdated the coronation by nine years, as well as changing the name of the king?

Matthew names three other historical figures within the entry. The first, Anania Mokac'i, was katholikos until 975/6; his identification could therefore fit either date. The second identification is of 'Lord Yovhannēs, katholikos of Albania'¹¹. According to the *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, the Albanian katholikos from 948/9 to 961/2 was named Gagik¹²; the thirteenth-century historian Step'anos Orbelian, however, records that Gagik died in 958/9. Orbelian also describes a dispute between the katholikos Gagik and a bishop named Yunan or Yovnan, who was consecrated as katholikos of Albania by Anania Mokac'i on the grounds that the consecration of Gagik had been invalid. Yunan was deposed by an Albanian church council in 949/50, but Anania never accepted the election of Gagik¹³. It is certainly plausible that Anania invited Yunan to attend the coronation of Ašot, that his presence was recorded as that of the 'katholikos of Albania', and that his name survived in some documents as 'Yovhannēs'. The third identification is that of 'P'ilippos the king of the Aluank'...the son of Gołazgak son of Vač'agan'¹⁴. The identity of P'ilippos remains a mystery; the only surviving records of a king of that name are Matthew's own history and that of Smbat Sparapet, who followed Matthew's history in his own¹⁵. Orbelian refers to a 'prince Grigor', who may have been the ruler of Albania, but no certain identification may be obtained from his work or from the *History of the Caucasian Albanians*.

Matthew's placement of the coronation in Ani is significant. Before Ašot III was crowned, the primary capital of Armenia, in which his

¹⁰ See, for example: Nina Garsoian, 'The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenian', in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, vol. 1. Ed. Richard G. Hovannisian. New York, St. Martin's Press, 2004, p. 165; René Grousset, *Histoire de la Arménie des origines à 1071*. Paris, Payot, 1947, pp. 481–2.

¹¹ Matthew p. 3.

¹² HCA p. 231.

¹³ Step'anos Orbelian, *Histoire de la Siounie*, trans. Marie-Félicité Brosset (St. Petersburg, 1864–1866), ch. LII, pp. 160–164. The original Armenian text was unavailable to me.

¹⁴ Matthew, pp. 3–4.

¹⁵ H. Ačaryan, *Hayoc Anjnanunneri Bařaran*. Yerevan, Erevani Petakan Hamalsaran, 1972. Vol. 5, p. 202, no. 8.

father Abas I resided, was in Kars. According to Asolik, ‘after Abas, Ašot his son, also known as *šahnšah*, reigned for 25 years. And Mušeł his brother reigned alongside him in Kars.’¹⁶ Asolik makes no reference to the city of Ani until after the year 414 (965/6), by which time the city is established, but his description of the simultaneous reigns of Ašot and Mušeł suggests that Ašot had moved to Ani around the time of his father’s death.

It is impossible, given the lack of historical or epigraphic corroboration, to be certain of the date of Ašot’s coronation. There is nothing in available published inscriptions or manuscript colophons between 952 and 962 that names the ruler of Armenia, Ani, or Kars. Matthew’s identification of the other dignitaries present at the coronation does provide clues, however. He has given the name of the katholikos who must have presided over a coronation of Ašot; he has given the name of another bishop who belongs to the era around 951. As will be seen below, where Matthew misdates the civil war between Smbat-Yovhannēs I and Ašot IV, his entries retain internal consistency — he gives the names of princes who were contemporaneous with the warring brothers. Given the level of detail in Matthew’s description of the ‘coronation’, and his reference to the ‘correct’ katholikos, it appears that he is describing the coronation of Ašot III, he has misdated it by nearly a decade, and he has changed Ašot’s name to Gagik.

The reason for the substitution of ‘Gagik’ for ‘Ašot’ becomes clear in short order. In his entry for the year 420 (971/2), Matthew recounts the succession war between Gagik’s sons, Smbat-Yovhannēs I and Ašot IV, that broke out shortly after Gagik’s death¹⁷. In fact, Gagik died between 1016 and 1020; his reign, as noted above, did not begin until 990. The scale of this mistake displays serious confusion on Matthew’s part, but it does explain why he believed that the king crowned by Anania, allegedly in 410 (961/2), was Gagik.

The explanation of Matthew’s mistakes in this entry, however, do not help to solve the larger problem posed by the dating of Gagik’s death to 420 (971/2). There was no succession in that year. Ašot III died in 977; his son Smbat II, Gagik’s brother and predecessor, died in 990. Although it is not sufficient to attribute all of the problems within this entry to simple mistaken identity, there is a clear case of it here. Matthew

¹⁶ ‘Եւ զինի Աբասայ թագաւորեաց Աշոտ որդի նորա, որ ի Շահանշահ կոչիւր ամս իԵւ Մուշել եղբայր նորա առ նովաւ թագաւորեաց ի Կարս:’ Asolik ch. 8 p. 39.
¹⁷ Matthew, pp. 7–11.

lacked a complete list of Armenian kings and the dates of their reigns. Perhaps he knew that a king called Ašot (that is, Ašot III) occupied the throne in this year, and that during the late tenth century there was a king called Smbat (that is, Smbat II). In addition, he knew that a king called Ašot (in this case, Ašot IV) had fought with a brother called Smbat over the succession; they were forced to share power, and Armenia had thereafter both a king Ašot and a king Smbat. The full name of the latter was Smbat-Yovhannēs, and Matthew consistently refers to him as Yovhannēs, but many surviving inscriptions name him simply as Smbat¹⁸. If Matthew believed that the warring brothers Smbat and Ašot belonged to the late tenth century, it was a simple matter to ‘correct’ the name of the rival kings’ father.

Matthew’s mistaken identification of the kings Ašot and Smbat explain why he has placed Gagik’s death and the ensuing civil war in the late tenth century, but there remains the question of how Matthew concluded that they belonged to the year 420 (971/2) in particular. The entries for this year, which treat the history of the Bagratuni and Pahlawuni families, are internally consistent for the year 470 (1021/2). Matthew’s list of neighbouring rulers correctly names the kings of Kars and Albania during the civil war; the katholikos who mediated between the brothers was Petros Getadarj, who had been consecrated in 468 (1019/20)¹⁹. The entry goes on to describe the death of an Armenian prince named Apirat at the hands of Abu'l-Uswar, the emir of Dvin; external sources verify that Abu'l-Uswar was the emir of Dvin by 1022²⁰. The remainder of the entry, which describes an invasion of Daylamite Muslims into the territory of Bjni, has been externally dated to 1021/2 based on Arab sources²¹. The entry also describes the death of Vasak Pahlawuni. There is some disagreement in the secondary sources as to when Vasak died; however, the date 470 (1021/2) is plausible²².

The prosopographical details given, along with external clues, indicate very strongly that this set of entries should have been placed in 470

¹⁸ Examples include a 1013 inscription on the Church of St. Minas in Hořomos, and two inscriptions on the church of Aplharip Pahlawuni in Ani that date from the last years of Yovhannēs’ reign. Both of these may be found in Ľewond M. Ališan, Širak. *Tetragruf iwn Patkerac'oyc'* (Venice, St. Lazar, 1981).

¹⁹ Aristakēs p. 28.

²⁰ A. N. Ter-Lewondyan, *The Arab Emirates in Bagratid Armenia*, trans. Nina Garsoian (Lisbon, Armenian Library of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1976) pp. 120–1.

²¹ Wolfgang Felix, *Byzanz und die islamische Welt im früheren 11. Jahrhundert: Geschichte der politischen Beziehungen von 1001 bis 1055* (Wien, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1981), p. 139.

²² *ibid.*

(1021/2). If these entries can be positively assigned to 470, his text would then provide the only firm date for the death of Gagik, which has only been established within the range 1016–1020²³. If this entry should have been dated to 470, why then did Matthew choose 420? There is a certain numerical tidiness in the mistake, but that alone does not explain it. There must be another reason to support the placement of these events in the year 420, and it may be found in the entry for the following year.

Within his entry for 421 (972/3), Matthew describes the gathering of all the Armenian noble families and their armies under Ašot in Hark‘, in order to meet the emperor John Tzimiskes and provide him with troops for the Byzantine campaign against the Muslims²⁴. The entry includes the text of two letters from Tzimiskes. The first was written by Tzimiskes to Ašot, and recounts his military victories in Anatolia, Syria, and Palestine; the second is a short letter addressed to the *vardapet* Levond. The list of princes Matthew gives in this entry is striking in its inaccuracy for the year 421 (972/3). In fact, it may consist entirely of those who ruled in the year after the civil war of Ani — that is, in the year 471 (1022/3). Abas, the son of Mušeł of Kars, reigned between 984 and 1029. ‘Gurgēn, king of the Albanians’ refers to Gurgēn of Abkhazia/Georgia, who reigned between 1014 and 1027. ‘Gurgēn, prince of Anjewac‘ik’ appears to be a problematic identification at first glance; it could refer to the second of the three grandsons of Gagik I Arcruni, who did control that province in 972. Yet Matthew also lists Senek‘erim, Gurgēn’s younger brother, as king of Vaspurakan. While he lived, Gurgēn held a higher rank than his brother; it seems unlikely that Matthew, or Matthew’s sources, would name Gurgēn as ‘prince’ while Senek‘erim was ‘king’. Perhaps the Gurgēn of Anjewac‘ik listed here is an otherwise unattested younger relative, who was granted the title by Senek‘erim himself. The most troublesome identification is that of P‘ilippos of Kapan, who is not explicitly attested elsewhere. The name is common within the royal family of Siounik‘ in both the tenth and eleventh centuries; a prince P‘ilippos could fit either date²⁵.

If Matthew had in fact confused Ašot III with his grandson Ašot IV, and knew that, in 421 (972/3), Ašot had called together the princes and armies of Armenia, he might have filled in the names of some princes based on his documentary knowledge of Ašot IV’s contemporaries. He

²³ Garsoian, ‘Medieval Armenia’.

²⁴ Matthew, pp. 17–19.

²⁵ Ačařyan, vol. 5, pp. 201–203.

would have accepted that Ašot gathered the armies rather than Smbat-Yovhannēs; Yovhannēs was not a warrior, and his dominion was within the city of Ani, whereas Ašot's dominion was the territory outside the city. Matthew was then able to arrive at a date for Ašot's accession: as late as possible before this gathering, or 420 (971/2). Only the need to explain the activities of a king named Ašot around 420 (971/2) is sufficient to explain the fifty-year misplacement of Gagik's death, the mis-identification of the king who might have been crowned in 410 (961/2), and the mis-identification of most of the princes who gathered in Hark'.

After 421, there is a long gap in Matthew's chronicle concerning the kings of Ani. From time to time, Matthew notes in an entry that the event occurred while Yovhannēs reigned in Ani, but says nothing more about the royal house until precisely the year 470 (1021/2). He masks the gap in his knowledge with items of ecclesiastical history, non-specific references to attacks against 'the Armenians', and an account of events concerning David *curopalates*, prince of Tayk²⁶.

The account of events in Tayk²⁶ merits consideration. It records the attack of Mamlan, emir of Atrpatakan, against Tayk²⁶, the murder of David *curopalates* by some of his courtiers 'a few years' after the defeat of Mamlan, and the revenge exacted by Basil II 'a few years later'²⁶. The isolation of this account from the rest of the text is striking. David *curopalates* was an influential figure in regional politics. He was granted Byzantine territory by Basil as a reward for his assistance against the rebel Bardas Skleros. When he later allied with the rebel Bardas Phokas against Basil, he was compelled in the aftermath of Phokas' defeat to will his principality to the empire in 990²⁷. The history of the career of David *curopalates* is crucial to an understanding of the loss of the Armenian kingdoms. It is therefore strange to find that Matthew, who was concerned with exactly this question, has written such an abbreviated and isolated account. It is also noteworthy that this relatively long piece, which is otherwise similar to the account of Asołik, contains not a single reference to any neighbouring Caucasian ruler — an unusual feature for Matthew's entries concerning the Bagratunis.

The date Matthew gives is 'in these times' around 432 (983/4); this is an incorrect date with no apparent source. It is well-attested that David died in or around the year 1000; Aristakēs states that it was the 25th year

²⁶ Matthew, pp. 34–38.

²⁷ Garsoian, 'Medieval Armenia' pp. 168–9.

of the reign of Basil II²⁸, and Asotik gives the precise date — Easter 449, or 31 March 1000²⁹. This is far more than ‘a few years’ after 432. Asolik reports the accession of Mamlan, who became emir upon his father’s death in 437 (988/9)³⁰; the battle must therefore have occurred sometime after 437, and likely occurred in a year closer to that of David’s death. How did Matthew come to place the account in 432?

The answer may lie in a date ambiguity in Asotik’s own text. He describes two offensives by Mamlan. One is reported in chapter 38, possibly for the year 439 (990/1)³¹. It did not result in a battle; after David collected his troops, Mamlan withdrew without a fight. The second, similar to Matthew’s account, is reported in chapter 41 and dated to the year 447 (998/9)³². Asolik notes that the offensive reported in chapter 38 occurred ‘before this by a few years’³³. The antecedent for ‘this’ is unclear. It could be taken to refer to the events in chapter 37, in which Asolik has backtracked to the year 437 (988/9). It is more likely that the second attack should be dated to the years before 444 (995/6), which is the date that Asolik had reached in chapter 36, representing his primary chronological thread. A reference to the death of Bat, emir of Apahunik³⁴, suggests that the offensive took place in or around 990 (438/9)³⁴. The history of Asolik is thus rendered more consistent, and Matthew’s relative dating of David’s murder as ‘a few years’ after Mamlan’s attack would thereby be plausible. If ‘before this’ was read and interpreted by Matthew or by an intermediate source as ‘before 437’, his placement of this account between the years 432 and 434 is explained.

Matthew does not return to Bagratuni history until 470 (1021/2). It is clear that he had almost no information about the Bagratuni kingdoms before this date. Apart from the disconnected information about David *curopalates*, he has included only two pieces of information that belong to the tenth century, and they are both largely uncorroborated. These are the coronation of a king (presumably Ašot) by the katholikos Anania, and the gathering of the princes of Armenia to meet John Tzimiskes in 972/3. This curious lack of information mirrors a narrative gap in the history

²⁸ Aristakēs pp. 22–23.

²⁹ Asotik ch. 43, p. 162.

³⁰ Asotik ch. 9, p. 73.

³¹ Asotik ch. 38, pp. 151–152.

³² Asotik ch. 41, pp. 156–159.

³³ Macler translates this clause as ‘Some years before the events that we shall recount’, but the Armenian displays more ambiguity: ‘Այլ նախ քան զայս սակաւ ամօք’.

³⁴ See Macler’s translation of Asotik, p. 151 note 3.

of Asołik, and suggests that there was no source available to Matthew in the early 12th century that closed the gap in Asołik's history.

The remainder of Matthew's chronicle entries support this conclusion. From 470 (1021/2), he focuses on the 'destruction' of Armenia — first the claims of Basil II against Abkhazia and Ani, next the loss of Ani to the Byzantine empire, and finally the loss of the former Armenian kingdoms to the invading Turks. This is precisely the tale that is told in the history of Aristakēs Lastivertc'i, and Matthew's account bears a striking resemblance to that of Aristakēs. Just as Asołik left gaps in his account of events in independent Armenia, Aristakēs leaves a gap concerning the reign of Gagik I, and Matthew's history reflects the same lack of information. Although Matthew includes a substantial amount of information not found in the history of Aristakēs, the narrative similarities strongly suggest a relationship between the two texts.

History of the Arcrunis and Vaspurakan

The other topic of Armenian royal history about which Matthew writes is the history of the Arcruni royal line, and events in Vaspurakan. Matthew's chronicle contains a wealth of information that does not exist in the earlier overlapping sources, which focus primarily on the Bagratuni kings to the north. Asołik devotes a single chapter of his own history to the reigns of the Arcruni kings; they make only occasional appearances in the remainder of the text. Aristakēs, whose history begins in earnest around the time that Vaspurakan was annexed by the empire, makes only an occasional reference to an Arcruni. Matthew's account of Arcruni history is almost entirely unique in the surviving sources. Can it be trusted?

Only two items of Arcruni history can be dated from external sources; they should be examined in order to help evaluate the chronological accuracy of the remainder of Matthew's information. The first of these is the treaty reportedly agreed between Basil II and Senek'erim in 449 (1000/1). Asołik also records this meeting, between Basil and two Armenian kings in the aftermath of the death of David *curopalates* in 449. These were 'the king of Vanand...the child Abas' and 'Senek'erim the king of Vaspurakan, brother of Gurgēn'³⁵. Although modern histories give the beginning of Senek'erim's reign as 1003, the year that Gurgēn died,

³⁵ Asołik ch. 43 p. 165.

Asołik's account suggests that he was already recognised with the title *թագաւոր* (king) before that date. In this sense, there is no factual error in Matthew's entry to account for.

The second item corroborated by outside sources concerns the Turkish invasion of Vaspurakan in 465 (1016/7)³⁶, the battle of Senek'erim's son David against the Turks, and Senek'erim's subsequent decision to cede his kingdom to the Byzantine emperor in return for land in Sebasteia. The battle itself may be precisely dated. Werner Seibt notes that the Armenian *synaxarion* includes a feast day for the martyrs of that battle; Seibt concludes from this that the battle must have taken place on 5 January 1017, that is, late in the Armenian year 465³⁷. In this case, Matthew's unusually early date for the invasion is justified.

Senek'erim's decision to emigrate is more difficult to date, and Matthew's decision to combine the initial invasion and the Arcruni migration into a single entry does not help matters. Skylitzes implies, but does not state outright, that this exchange occurred in 1016³⁸. The emigration is also recorded in the colophons of two manuscripts; the first dates the emigration to 468 (1019/20)³⁹, and the other to 470 (1021/2)⁴⁰. The manuscripts themselves date from 1603 and 1814, respectively. Yahyā ibn Sa'īd, on the other hand, suggests that the emigration took place closer to 1020, during Basil's war in Abkhazia⁴¹. Aristakēs suggests the same⁴², although neither he nor Yahyā gives a precise date. The continuator of T'ovma Arcruni states that the exchange occurred in 470 (1021/2)⁴³. Matthew's date for the Turkish invasion and the subsequent emigration is in harmony with both the *synaxarion* and with the account of Skylitzes.

Three items of Arcruni history given by Matthew are anecdotes unique in the historical record. The first recounts for the year 424 (975/6) the treachery of the general Apllarip, who had been dismissed from the post of *sparapet* by Derenik, 'king' of Anjewac'ik. In retaliation, he betrayed

³⁶ This date is given as 465 (*Ակտ*) in the Valaršapat text, but 467 (*Ակտ*) in the Jerusalem text and three of the five Valaršapat variants. For the purposes of this study I have accepted 465 as the correct reading.

³⁷ Werner Seibt, 'Die Eingliederung von Vaspurakan in das byzantinische Reich,' *Handes Amsorya* 92 (1978): 49–66.

³⁸ Skylitzes p. 296.

³⁹ Karekin I Yovsēp'ian, *Colophons of Manuscripts, 5th century to 1250* (Antalya: Press of the Armenian Katholikosate of Kilikia, 1951), pp. 205–206.

⁴⁰ Yovsēp'ian, *Colophons* pp. 213–214.

⁴¹ Yahyā III, p. 463.

⁴² Aristakēs pp. 35, 39.

⁴³ T'ovma Arcruni, *Patmut'iwn Tann Arcruneac'*, ed. M. H. Darbinyan-Melik'yan (Yerevan: Matenadaran, 2006), pp. 335–338.

Derenik in battle against Ablhač (Abū'l-Hajjī), the emir of Her⁴⁴. This is the most difficult item of the three to correctly date. Of the three names that Matthew gives, each poses its own identification problem. Abū'l-Hayjā al-Rawwādī could be found ‘with his vassals’ in the area of Āhar, east of Her, in 957⁴⁵. He appears in the history of Asolik when in 436 (987/8), now the emir of Atrpatakan (Iranian Azerbaijan), he seized the territories of Abū Dulaf Shaibānī, the emir of Golt‘n⁴⁶. Another ‘Ablhač’ — Abū'l-Hajjī, son of Ibrāhīm bin Marzbān — is attested in this period. Asolik describes his defeat to Abū Dulaf in 431 (982/3), his loss of Dvin ‘and all his cities’, and his subsequent travels and eventual murder⁴⁷. Neither of these can be confirmed as the emir of Her during this era, although Abū'l-Hayjā al-Rawwādī may have been present in the region during the 970s. Asolik is also our only source for the identification of Aplłarip. He records a battle in 432 (983/4) between Abū Dulaf and Ašot⁴⁸, king of Vaspurakan, in which the *sparapet* Aplłarip was captured by the emir⁴⁹. The identification of Derenik remains a mystery. Derenik-Ašot, the elder son of Gagik Arcruni, had died in 958/9; by 975/6, his nephew Ašot-Sahak was king of Armenia, and Ašot-Sahak’s brother Gurgēn-Xač’ik was prince of Anjewac’ik. Gurgēn-Xač’ik had a son, Derenik, who succeeded him as prince in 990/1; it may be this Derenik, who would have been a junior prince in Anjewac’ik in 975/6, to whom the entry refers.

Although the other two items are uncorroborated by external sources, they are plausibly dated by Matthew. One records a dispute in 489 (1040/1) between the emperor Constantine IX Monomachos and the brothers Atom and Abusahl, who were the sons of Senek’erim Arcruni and princes of Sebasteia⁵⁰. The other records a battle fought in the district of T’onrawan, in Vaspurakan, in 490 (1041/2). In the entry prior to this one, Matthew explains that the Byzantines had levied troops from Armenia in order to fight ‘those who had rebelled’ among the ‘Goths’ in the West; this seems to refer to the Bulgar uprising of 489 (1040/1). Now he reports the death of an ‘illustrious Armenian prince’ named Xač’ik, whose elder sons were

⁴⁴ Matthew, pp. 30–33.

⁴⁵ Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2004) p. 257.

⁴⁶ Asolik ch. 19, p. 71.

⁴⁷ Asolik ch. 12, pp. 51–52.

⁴⁸ Ašot-Sahak, r. 968/9 to 990/1.

⁴⁹ Asolik ch. 13, pp. 52–53.

⁵⁰ Matthew, pp. 82–84.

away in the West with the Byzantine emperor Michael IV⁵¹; with this entry, Matthew neatly demonstrates the consequences of the annexation, and the removal of Armenian soldiers from their homelands. Xač'ik and his sons are unattested elsewhere.

Matthew provides rare and valuable pieces of information about the Arcrunis and about Vaspurakan in this period. Where it can be verified, the chronology for Arcruni history is generally accurate; the only event for which a date cannot be established, Apllarip's betrayal of Derenik to the emir Ablhač, occurs early in the century, during the period of Matthew's greatest chronological confusion. In the absence of conflicting evidence, and in the light of Matthew's generally accurate chronology for the Arcrunis, this date can be provisionally accepted as correct pending an explanation of his remaining chronological mistakes for events in the tenth century. These fall within the realm of Armenian ecclesiastical history.

Armenian ecclesiastical history

Matthew's treatment of the history of the Armenian church within the Chronicle has chronological characteristics that suggest it should be treated separately from secular Armenian history. For the first half of the century covered by Book 1, these 'ecclesiastical' items simply record the succession of Armenian katholikoi. The chronology for this half-century is error-ridden. The death of the katholikos Anania and accession of Vahan, dated by Asotik to 414 (965/6), is dated by Matthew to 425 (976/7)⁵². Vahan is nevertheless named as katholikos in Matthew's account of the gathering at Hark' in 421 (972/3); a letter from him is delivered to the emperor Tzimiskes. In addition to these discrepancies, Matthew fails to mention a major ecclesiastical dispute between 414 and 421 (965-973), which was recorded by Asołik and later recorded by Kirakos Ganjakec'i⁵³ and Step'anos Orbelian⁵⁴. Vahan, suspected of wishing 'to bring about friendship and accord with Chalcedonians'⁵⁵, was deposed by a church council and replaced by Step'anos. Vahan fled

⁵¹ Matthew, pp. 90–92.

⁵² Matthew, p. 33.

⁵³ Kirakos Ganjakec'i, *Kirakos Gandzaketsi's history of the Armenians*, trans. Robert Bedrosian (New York: Sources of the Armenian Tradition, 1986) I.86, p. 78. The original Armenian text was unavailable to me.

⁵⁴ Orbelian, ch. 53 pp. 166–167.

⁵⁵ 'Սա ընդ քաղկեդոնականս սիրելութիւն և Հաճութիւն կամեցաւ առնել թղթովք' (Asotik, ch. 8 p. 41)

to Vaspurakan, where the king Apusahl-Hamazasp was sympathetic toward him. After both rival katholikoi died in 421 (972/3), Xač'ik was elected as the new katholikos.

In contrast, Matthew records the death of the ‘holy’ katholikos Vahan, and the accession of the ‘godly’ Step’anos, in 432 (983/4)⁵⁶. In his next entry, dated to 434 (985/6), he records the death of Step’anos and the accession of Xač'ik⁵⁷. The date given for the ‘accession’ of Step’anos preserves the eleven-year discrepancy with the account of Asolik, but with the accession of Xač'ik Matthew extends that discrepancy to thirteen years. His chronology is then suddenly corrected to agree with that of Asolik, as he records the death of Xač'ik and accession of Sargis in 440 (991/2)⁵⁸.

It remains unclear how Matthew might have concluded that Anania died in 425 (976/7), but his arithmetic is otherwise consistent with his narrative. Asolik does not give a date for Vahan’s deposition, but indicates that he was recognised by some, including king Apusahl-Hamazasp of Vaspurakan, until his death. Orbelian concurs with Matthew in giving the length of Step’anos’ tenure as two years. If Matthew knew that Step’anos reigned for two years, but did not realise that his term had run concurrently with Vahan’s, then he would add the two years of Step’anos’ tenure to the seven years of Vahan’s, producing a total of nine years between the death of Anania and the accession of Xač'ik. He then shortened Xač'ik’s tenure from nineteen years to six, in order to reconcile his date for Xač'ik’s accession, 434 (985/6), with his date for Sargis’ accession, 440 (991/2). Despite the arithmetic he employed in order to reconcile the missing or erroneous dates he had before 440 (991/2), Matthew has retained one correct detail elsewhere in the Chronicle — the fact that Vahan was katholikos in 421 (972/3).

The remainder of the ecclesiastical theme within Book 1 displays accurate chronology elsewhere in the Chronicle where external corroboration exists. It does initially appear that Matthew has erred in recording the accession of Petros Getadarj in 471 (1022/3), upon the death of Sargis⁵⁹. Aristakēs, in contrast, records Petros’ accession in 468 (1019/20)⁶⁰. He also notes that Sargis was alive at the time — this was an innovation on the usual practice, in which a new katholikos was elected after the death of the current one⁶¹. Aristakēs records the death of Sargis ‘in that time’ shortly

⁵⁶ Matthew, p. 34.

⁵⁷ Matthew, pp. 38–39.

⁵⁸ Matthew, pp. 40–41.

⁵⁹ Matthew, pp. 50–51.

⁶⁰ Aristakēs p. 28.

⁶¹ Fr. Krikor H. Maksoudian, *Chosen of God: The Election of the Catholicos of All Armenians from the Fourth Century to the Present* (New York: St. Vartan Press, 1995) pp. 37–38.

after the winter of 470 (1021/2), when Petros performed the ‘river-turning’ miracle that earned him his surname ‘Getadarj’ at the Epiphany feast in the presence of Basil II. The Armenian year 471 began on 16 March 1022, just before the end of the winter of 470; if Sargsi died in the spring, then his death has been correctly dated by Matthew to 471. In addition, Matthew writes that Petros was *Հաստատեաց* (‘confirmed’) as katholikos; generally, the word he uses for the succession is *Ճողնապրեաց* (‘consecrated’). This distinct phrasing suggests that he was working from a source that accurately reflected the consecration of Petros during Sargsi’s lifetime. Matthew is guilty here not of chronological inaccuracy, but of lack of clarity.

Matthew includes one episode of ecclesiastical history that is uncorroborated by the other historians. He describes a dispute between Petros and Yovhannēs I in 486–487 (1037/9); the conflict between Ani’s religious and secular leaders resulted in the election and subsequent deposition of a rival katholikos named Dioskoros, while Petros took refuge in Byzantine-controlled Vaspurakan⁶². This entry has an internal chronology inconsistent with the dates Matthew gives — Petros is supposed to have left for Vaspurakan in 486 (1037/8), where he stayed for four years until his imprisonment, release, and reinstatement in 487 (1038/9). Apart from the mysterious telescoping of Petros’ ‘four-year’ stay in Vaspurakan, the chronology is probably correct — Petros was imprisoned in 1037, and Dioskoros was deposed in late 1038⁶³. Just as he has done with the death of Basil II and the reign of Constantine VIII in relation to the first prophecy of Yovhannēs Kozeřn, here Matthew has compressed the timeline of the dispute between Petros and Yovhannēs I in order to illustrate the dissension that Kozeřn prophesied in 485 (1036/7). The entry also gives a rare piece of data about Armenian life in Vaspurakan after the annexation. Vaspurakan’s long history of providing refuge to katholikoi who were out of favour with the Bagratuni kings of Ani seems to have continued even after the departure of the Arcruni kings.

Armenian church and state in the tenth century: a single source?

The question of Matthew’s sources has always been a vexed one. Although he claims that he has used written sources in the composition of his history⁶⁴, he names none of them, and scholars have been able to

⁶² Matthew, pp. 75–78.

⁶³ J.-P. Mahé, ‘L’Église arménienne de 611 à 1066’, *Histoire du christianisme*, t. 4, *Évêques, moines et empereurs (610-1054)*. Paris: Desclée, 1993, p. 527.

⁶⁴ Matthew, pp. 112, 280.

identify very few of them. L. Xačik'yan has convincingly shown a link between the few surviving fragments of the chronicle of Yakob Sanahneč'i and the corresponding entries within the Chronicle⁶⁵, but this is the only direct textual link that has been found. Although the text of the surviving entries of Sanahneč'i's chronicle is stylistically and factually very similar to the corresponding entries within Matthew's, and the stylistic similarity can be seen in nearly every one of Matthew's entries throughout the Chronicle, there is simply not enough evidence to declare that Sanahneč'i was Matthew's only source. This uncertainty must lead us to phrase the question of Matthew's sources in two different ways: If Matthew's history of events up to 500 (1051/2) is in fact nothing more than a summary of Sanahneč'i's chronicle, from what source or sources might Sanahneč'i himself have been working? If not, what were Matthew's other sources? Both of these questions must lead to the same type of investigation.

When considered in isolation, the theme of ecclesiastical history shows two clear and unique characteristics. First, the dating arithmetic employed by Matthew to reconcile the tenures of the katholikoi Anania, Vahan, Step'anos, and Xačik' is unlike any of his other chronological irregularities. Second, although Matthew is a fierce anti-Chalcedonian, his depiction of ecclesiastical history betrays no evidence of doctrinal battles within the Armenian church. There is no hint of the deposition of Vahan or the reasons behind it. Matthew records two ecclesiastical disputes within Book 1; these are a dispute with the Greek church over the date of Easter 1007 and the dispute between Petros Getadarj and Yovhannēs I in 486/7 (1037/9). In neither case are the opponents presented as two Armenian clerics divided by confession; the differences are represented as ethnic and political, respectively. Matthew's presentation of Armenian ecclesiastical history is in this respect very different from that of either Asołik or Aristakēs, and two factors suggest that his information on the history of the Armenian church and his history of the Armenian kingdoms in the tenth century may share a source from Vaspurakan.

The first of these factors is precisely the absence of information about doctrinal dispute. By the time of Vahan's election, there was established precedent for a katholikos who had fallen out of favour with the Bagratuni kings to seek refuge in Vaspurakan. According to both Asolik and Step'anos

⁶⁵ L. Xačik'yan, 'Hakob Sanahneč'i Žamanakagir XI dari', *Banber Erevani Hamal-sarani* 13.1 (1971): pp. 22–47.

Orbelian, Vahan did just that. He remained there until his death; the near-simultaneous death of Step'anos resolved the dispute. Given the tradition of Vaspurakan as a refuge for bishops out of favour with the Bagratids, a historical record from Vaspurakan was likely to be much more ambivalent about doctrinal disputes than the staunchly anti-Chalcedonian Asołik.

The second factor is the paucity of information about the kingdom of Ani before 1021. After the coronation of Ašot III in 401 (952/3), the only other event Matthew describes is the gathering of Armenian princes at Hark' in 972. He gives a list of princes taken from his account of the 1021 civil war, rather than any list of princes in 972; he includes the full text of two letters, including one addressed to a *vardapet*. Every other document that Matthew copies into the Chronicle — the two prophecies of Yovhannēs Kožern in 1029 and 1036⁶⁶, the defence of Armenian faith by Gagik II Bagratuni in 1065⁶⁷, and the letter written by Grigor Vkayasēr in the wake of the dispute over the date of Easter 1102⁶⁸ — belongs to the theme of church history; the two letters of Tzimiskes, including the one addressed to Łeñond *vardapet*, are likely to have been taken from the same source.

The third factor is a possible solution to three separate dating puzzles. Matthew has probably misdated the coronation of Ašot III Bagratuni by nine years. He has misdated the death of the katholikos Anania Mokac'i by eleven years; due to his omission of the conflict that arose after Anania's death, the error is extended to thirteen years for the accession of Khach'ik. For both of these events, the magnitude of Matthew's chronological error for events recorded before 440 (991/2) is roughly ten years.

Might Matthew have similarly misdated the betrayal of the Arcruni prince Derenik by the general Aplharip? This would suggest a date of roughly 414 (965/6) for the battle. That date is not plausible, however. The elder Derenik, king of Armenia, had died seven years previously; if the younger Derenik had been born by 965, he was unlikely to have been old enough to lead troops in battle. Apart from the fifty-year misdating of the Bagratuni civil war, and apart from items (primarily of Byzantine history) in which small chronological errors may be found that match the errors or ambiguities in other Greek or Armenian sources, Matthew displays only one sort of chronological error, and that is this ten-year late

⁶⁶ Matthew pp. 52–55, 68–74.

⁶⁷ Matthew pp. 163–178.

⁶⁸ Matthew pp. 288–292.

misplacement of events. The betrayal of Apltarip could not have been misdated by ten years; it is the only item of non-Byzantine history in the tenth century that is not so misdated. It is the only record of such an event in Vaspurakan during the late tenth century. This suggests that the event is not misdated at all. When taken together with the other factors that indicate a relationship between these three themes, the outlines of an ecclesiastical document from Vaspurakan — one with a dating error of roughly ten years for non-local events before the year 440 (991/2) — begins to emerge.

This does not seem very likely to be the chronicle of Yakob Sanahneč'i itself. Neither his name, nor his career as recounted by Matthew, nor the surviving fragments of his text suggest a link with the Arcrunis or with Vaspurakan. The dates that have been preserved in the fragments offer no clues, and an anecdote that does survive — the report that Basil II secretly accepted Armenian baptism — suggests no ambivalence about the Chalcedonian question. Finally, it does not seem credible that the account of the succession of katholikoi after Anania Mokac'i that Matthew has adopted, which omits all mention of the dispute between Vahan and Step'anos, would have been written by a *vardapet* from Sanahin who would have had older colleagues who remembered the controversy. The ‘Vaspurakan document’, if it existed, must have been a second source of information for the early part of Matthew’s Chronicle.

Conclusion

Through a close examination of the chronological errors within Book 1 of Matthew’s Chronicle, several conclusions may be drawn about the nature and reliability of the information he gives therein. First, when he has misplaced an event, most of the details he gives remain internally consistent. His set of entries for the year 420 (971/2) is the best example of this. Based upon the details Matthew gives within these entries, they may be reassigned to the year 470 (1021/2) with some confidence. This remains true even when Matthew has had to contradict himself, most notably when he names the reigning katholikoi. In every entry in which the katholikos makes an appearance in Bagratuni or Arcruni history, he retains the name of the correct one, despite his faulty understanding of the succession of katholikoi during the tenth century. Matthew’s retention of the name of the correct katholikos in these entries, despite his muddled chronology of the succession, help to establish their reliability.

The presence of Anania Mokac'i and the Albanian cleric Yovhannēs at the ‘coronation of Gagik’ in 410 (961/2) suggests that, although it probably did not occur in 410 and although the king of Armenia was not Gagik, a ceremony at Ani did occur.

Second, his chronology for the history of the Armenian royal families and the Armenian church can generally be relied upon beginning with the year 440 (991/2). Matthew’s account of Bagratuni history is almost nonexistent before the year 470. It consists only of the mysterious ‘coronation of Gagik’ at Ani — which was originally a description of the coronation of Ašot III in 401 (952/3) — and background information which accompanies the letter from the Byzantine emperor John Tzimiskes to the king Ašot III in 421 (972/3). Although the Arcruni history he includes is similarly sparse for this period, it remains the most complete account that survives. It is within the theme of ecclesiastical history that Matthew’s chronological correction is seen most clearly. The dates he gives for the accession of katholikoi are eleven years later than they should be, and distorted further by Matthew’s misunderstanding of the rivalry between the katholikoi Vahan and Step’anos. The magnitude of his errors in recounting the history of Vaspurakan and the history of the Armenian church, as well as his curious omission of doctrinal dispute within the church, suggest that he may have taken his information about these two themes from a single source, which is now lost.

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